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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 BERLIN 000245

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SUBJECT: EUR PDAS RIES'S FEBRUARY 24-25 VISIT TO BERLIN

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES JOHN KOENIG. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. During EUR PDAS Ries's February 24-25 visit to Berlin, senior German officials warmly welcomed the commitment of the new U.S. Administration to partnership and consultation, and foresaw no major divergence between the U.S. and Germany on the key issues to be addressed at the March 5 NATO foreign ministerial or the April 3-4 NATO Summit. MFA continued to push for a group of "eminent persons" to take the lead in preparing NATO's new strategic concept. Both MFA and Chancellery expressed doubts about the feasibility -- or necessity -- of an ISAF troop contributors meeting at the level of heads of state and government in conjunction with the NATO Summit, believing a meeting of foreign and/or defense ministers to be sufficient. The Chancellery welcomed the new Administration's embrace of a whole-of-government approach in Afghanistan as being completely in line with their own concept of "networked security," while the MOD expressed appreciation for SecDef's understanding of the German position on Afghanistan and for not being "pushy" at Krakow. On Russia, both the MFA and Chancellery praised U/S Burns's recent visit to Moscow and stressed the need to work with Russia in NATO and other fora. Other issues addressed during PDAS Ries's visit included Iran, the Balkans, counterpiracy, and the stationing of U.S. troops and nuclear weapons in Europe. END SUMMARY.

INTERLOCUTORS

12. (C) During a February 24-25 visit to Berlin, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Marcie Ries had separate meetings with MFA Political Director Volker Stanzel, Chancellery Director of Security Affairs Geza von Geyr, MOD Assistant Chief of Staff for Political Military Affairs Major General Manfred Lange and Bundestag Deputy Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Hans-Ulrich Klose. PDAS Ries also met over lunch with the directors of several prominent German research institutes, including Constanze Stelzenmueller of the German Marshall Fund and Thomas Paulsen of the Koerber Foundation.

MESSAGE FROM WASHINGTON

13. (C) In all her meetings, PDAS Ries stressed the new Administration's commitment to partnership and consultation, and welcomed German input for the ongoing foreign policy reviews in Washington. On Afghanistan, she said the new Administration understood that success could not be achieved through military means alone, and that a comprehensive approach involving economic development, governance and regional partners would be necessary. She noted that

Secretary Clinton looked forward to giving other NATO foreign ministers an idea of "where the strategic review is going" at the March 5 informal NATO foreign ministerial and at the Transatlantic Dinner the night before.

14. (C) On Russia, Ries reiterated that while the U.S. was looking forward to a new start on relations with Russia, there were certain red lines, as Vice President Biden had outlined recently in Munich: no spheres of influence, no recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and all countries should be free to choose their own alliances. She noted that Iran, energy security and climate change would also be high on the new Administration's foreign policy agenda. While recognizing that the upcoming NATO Summit was intended to celebrate the Alliance's 60-year anniversary, Ries emphasized the need for a "forward-looking" agenda that included Afghanistan, NATO-Russia relations, the launch of work on a new strategic concept and the admission of Croatia and Albania as new members. She said that the draft Declaration on Alliance Security, which is intended to launch work on a new strategic concept, had all the right elements, but that it needed to be pitched at a higher level and made more compelling to the general public.

POSITIVE RESPONSE TO NEW ADMINISTRATION THINKING

15. (C) At the Chancellery, von Geyr said that Ries's broad outlines of new U.S. Administration thinking "very much" matched the German government's own views. He said that unlike the lead-up to last year's NATO Bucharest Summit, when there was a looming clash over MAP for Georgia and Ukraine,

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he did not see any areas "where we have contradictions" in advance of the April NATO Summit. He thought this provided a good basis for launch of work on the new NATO strategic concept at the Summit. He said Germany was "very unsatisfied" with the state of NATO-EU relations and hoped that the U.S. would "push" Turkey to become more flexible in resolving the dispute.

16. (C) Von Geyr also emphasized that Merkel was "doing a lot" behind the scenes to strengthen NATO. He said her decision to co-host the April Summit was expression of her commitment to the transatlantic relationship. He noted that the Chancellor has publicly advocated, and feels strongly, that NATO should be the forum of discussion of all key transatlantic security questions.

17. (C) MFA Political Director Volker Stanzel also welcomed the new Administration's "re-think" of U.S. foreign policy as well as the short time-line for its completion. Given the upcoming NATO Summit, he stressed that it was important to "get our strategic act together" as soon as possible.

DECLARATION ON ALLIANCE SECURITY/NEW STRATEGIC CONCEPT

18. (C) In response to Ries's comment on the draft Declaration on Alliance Security, Stanzel said he was "not unhappy with the substance." He was especially pleased that the draft was modest and not the "mini strategic concept" that the NATO Secretary General had in mind originally. That would have prejudiced future work on the new strategic concept. Stanzel hoped work on the declaration would be completed by the time of the March 5 informal NATO foreign ministerial.

19. (C) Looking ahead, Stanzel argued in favor of having a group of "eminent persons" prepare a document that sets the "political direction" for the new strategic concept, akin to the 1967 Harmel Report. Once there was political agreement among the Allies on the broad outlines, it could then be given to the technical experts "to work out the details." Stanzel made clear that the MFA wanted input from the eminent persons before any "at-26" drafting. He expressed concern that if left solely to the "technical experts," the result would be "a big body of text" that was not accessible to the

general public. (Note: Chancellery National Security Advisor Christoph Heusgen offered a competing view in a February 25 discussion with the Charge, suggesting that the eminent persons should draft the strategic concept outright. End Note.)

PROPOSED SUMMIT MEETING OF ISAF TROOP CONTRIBUTORS

¶10. (C) Stanzel voiced concern about the proposed ISAF troop contributors meeting at the level of heads of state and government, as pushed by Australia at Krakow. While the meeting had to wait until after the conclusion of the U.S. Afghanistan policy review, it needed to be held far enough in advance of the NATO Summit that its conclusions could be taken into account by NATO leaders. Stanzel indicated that from the German perspective, an ISAF contributors' meeting at the level of foreign ministers and/or defense ministers would "do the job," but he recognized that this did not meet Australia's demand.

¶11. (C) Von Geyr at the Chancellery was even more emphatic in making the case against an ISAF troop contributors meeting at the level of heads of state and government. He saw no possibility of holding it between the April 2 G-20 meeting and the April 3-4 NATO Summit. He argued that largely because of logistical considerations, it was "not feasible" to hold such a meeting in Strasbourg or Baden-Baden. The two cities were already tapped out because of the NATO Summit and could not accommodate 10-15 additional delegations from non-NATO ISAF troop contributing nations.

¶12. (C) The alternative venue was Brussels, but von Geyr wondered whether President Obama would be willing to stop in Brussels between London and Strasbourg/Baden-Baden for such a meeting. He emphasized that the NATO Summit was supposed to be primarily a celebratory event with Allies only, and that Germany saw no "formal or political obligation" to have a Summit meeting of ISAF contributors this year, since one was held just last year in Bucharest. Like Stanzel, von Geyr

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indicated that Germany could support the French proposal to hold the ISAF contributors meeting at the level of foreign and/or defense ministers in Brussels on March 31 or April 1. He also opined that the Australian defense minister had "gone too far" at Krakow in threatening to withdraw his country's troops if there were no summit meeting of ISAF contributors meeting. (Note: NSA Heusgen told Charge that Merkel planned to convey her views to PM Rudd on February 26. End Note.)

CROATIAN NATO ACCESSION

¶13. (C) Stanzel was unaware of the petition drive in Slovenia to block ratification of Croatia's NATO accession protocol, and turned to MFA Western Balkans Director Mark Bogdahn for an evaluation of how serious the situation was. Bogdahn said he was "hopeful" that the petition drive would fail, but declined to rule out the possibility. While agreeing it was important to do everything possible to keep the Slovene-Croat border dispute from de-railing Croatia's accession to NATO, Stanzel wondered how much influence Germany and others would be able to exert, given their lack of success in pressuring Greece to compromise on the Macedonian name issue.

AFGHANISTAN

¶14. (C) Von Geyr noted that Ries's emphasis on a whole-of-government approach to Afghanistan was in complete accord with Germany's own concept of "networked security." Along those lines, he thought one of the main summit messages should be the need for more engagement in all areas, military as well as civilian. He underscored that Germany had already agreed to do more on the military side as announced by Defense Minister Jung in Krakow, with the deployment of 600 additional troops.

¶15. (C) Von Geyr also confirmed that as soon as French financing concerns are overcome, the German government is ready to seek the required parliamentary mandate so that the Bundeswehr can participate in the forthcoming NATO AWACS deployment to Afghanistan. He said that the requested German contribution to the ANA Trust Fund could only come out of the MFA and MOD budgets, since Development Ministry funds could not be used for these purposes; that could complicate German efforts to fully meet the request. Von Geyr raised the issue of how to deal with President Karzai during the interregnum between the end of his term on May 22 and the August 20 presidential elections. He said he was not clear what the U.S. position was, and that Germany did not want to take a contradictory stand.

¶16. (C) At MOD, MG Lange noted that Jung and SecDef had had a bilateral meeting on the margins of the Krakow ministerial. Lange praised SecDef for his understanding of the German position and for not being "pushy." By contrast, he expressed displeasure with the attitude of the UK defense minister, who, according to Lange, said at the ministerial that he was "proud" of the nine nations fighting in the south, thereby indirectly disparaging those nations deployed elsewhere. He pointed out that while most German soldiers -- including the 600 additional ones -- are based in the north, Germany has radio operators in Kandahar and provides air transport and reconnaissance support for ISAF throughout the country.

¶17. (C) Lange also put down a marker that it was important not to "amalgamate" the OEF and ISAF missions, but to keep them separate, since each has its own "character." While freely admitting that the real distinction between the two is far less now than before -- since ISAF also conducts combat operations -- he thought it was important for the sake of public support in Germany to retain a formal separation.

¶18. (C) Asked how the international community could do better in Afghanistan, Deputy Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Hans-Ulrich Klose (SPD) argued that the operation to overthrow the Taliban and stabilize the country should have been a NATO one from the start. Unfortunately, the German government had not said at the beginning of ISAF that this was a "fighting" operation as well as a stabilization one. As a result, most Germans still had the misperception that ISAF mostly involved facilitating reconstruction and that military force was only used to defend aid workers. No one

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in the German government was willing to acknowledge that this was really a "war."

¶19. (C) Klose criticized Defense Minister Jung as being "overly cautious" about German casualties and said he was "not the right person" for this job. Klose said that to the degree that Germans see a connection between Afghanistan and their own national security, many see it negatively, i.e., making Germany more vulnerable to terrorism and other attacks, rather than less so.

A NEW APPROACH TO NATO?

¶20. (C) Over lunch, two think-tankers, Paulsen from Koerber and Stelzenmueller from GMF, argued it was important for the U.S. to break from what they said was the tendency of the previous Administration to view NATO as simply a "toolbox" to be used as it pleased. Stelzenmueller thought the Alliance was still suffering wounds caused when the U.S. did not work through NATO in response to the 9/11 attacks, despite the Alliance's historic invocation of Article 5. She called on the U.S. to conduct genuine consultation on major security issues at NATO and not simply to use the Alliance to seek support for pre-set positions.

¶21. (C) On NATO enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia, Paulsen noted that the dispute over MAP had led to a perverse result

at Bucharest, with both countries receiving a promise of eventual NATO membership instead of MAP. He claimed that there continued to be great doubts in Germany about the suitability of either country for NATO membership and that "no one" in Germany really supported the Bucharest commitment. Stelzenmueller argued that the effort to push enlargement to Georgia and Ukraine had caused "blow-back," not only in Georgia and Ukraine, but also in NATO members, which ironically had undermined the whole process.

RUSSIA

¶22. (C) Both MFA and the Chancellery welcomed the recent trip to Moscow by Undersecretary Burns and NSC Senior Director McFaul as a "good gesture" and noted that it had apparently gone well. Stanzel at the MFA indicated that Germany was ready to resume formal meetings of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) and noted that the Russians had suggested discussing Georgia and Afghanistan. While asserting that Georgia "doesn't make sense" as an NRC topic, Stanzel thought Afghanistan would be a good choice and regretted that there was still no consensus to move forward on this basis.

¶23. (C) Von Geyr at the Chancellery did not speak to the issue of resuming formal NRC meetings, but made the point that the Russians were important partners on many issues (Iran, Middle East, North Korea, Balkans, etc.) and the West had to work with them. At the same time, the West had to stick to its principles and be firm in voicing concerns, as Merkel had done with Medvedev regarding unacceptable Russian behavior in Georgia. He said the key was not letting Russia divide the Allies. He volunteered that Merkel did not care for the Medvedev European security proposal at all, and saw it as a blatant attempt to divide and undermine NATO.

LACK OF EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP

¶24. (C) Parliamentarian Klose voiced concern about the "re-nationalization" of economic policy within Europe and regretted the lack of leadership to counteract the trend toward beggar-thy-neighbor policies. French President Sarkozy was "smart," but "too jumpy" to fill the leadership void, while Chancellor Merkel was "solid," but lacked the required charisma. Because of Germany's dependence on exports, the economic crisis would hit the country hard -- already there were estimates that economic growth could decline by as much as 5% in 2009. As a result, Klose thought it would be difficult for the Grand Coalition government to take any difficult foreign policy decisions before the September 2009 Bundestag elections.

IRAN

¶25. (C) At MFA, Stanzel said the U.S. offer of direct talks with Iran was the West's "last remaining trump card" and that

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as a result, it was important to "play it well." He noted that key questions remained to be answered, including what kind of talks, at what level, and when should they start. Stanzel said it would be also critical to decide whether the nuclear issue leads off the talks or comes at the end. He thought leaving the nuclear issue until the end risked allowing the Iranians to string the West along and avoid addressing the core questions until they had mastered the entire fuel cycle.

¶26. (C) Stanzel did not think that the upcoming presidential election in Iran would make a big difference regarding Iran's stand on the nuclear issue, pointing out that Larijani himself had admitted at a press conference in Munich that this question would be decided by Iran's supreme religious leader, not the president. Paulsen from Koerber thought the U.S. had to be careful in moving forward with direct talks before the Iranian elections -- otherwise, it could inadvertently give Ahmadinejad the chance to claim credit and

swing the election in his favor.

BALKANS

¶27. (C) At MOD, MG Lange said he agreed that EUFOR Althea needed to remain in Bosnia to support the Office of the High Representative, but said he was feeling "isolated," with the French deciding unilaterally to pull out. Lange thought it was important to refrain from any such decisions before the next Peace Implementation Council (PIC) meeting in March.

¶28. (C) Lange also expressed concern about the desire of the UK and others to draw-down KFOR to 2,000 by 2010. He thought this was "too fast" in light of the remaining challenges in Kosovo, particularly the continued existence of parallel structures in majority Serb areas of the country.

COUNTERPIRACY

¶29. (C) Lange confirmed that when Standing NATO Maritime Group (SNMG) I transits Somalian waters in the coming weeks, participating German ships will have to come under the command of the EU Atalanta operation in order to conduct counterpiracy operations. Lange thought a separate parliamentary mandate to do counterpiracy missions under NATO would only be possible after the September 2009 parliamentary elections. Until then, the Bundeswehr would have to improvise by utilizing its existing EU Atalanta mandate. To facilitate getting a separate NATO mandate, Lange said it was critical for SACEUR to start a "normal NATO operational planning process" for the counterpiracy mission.

STATIONING OF U.S. FORCES AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN EUROPE

¶30. (C) Lange asked whether the new Administration was reconsidering the decision to remove two of the four remaining U.S. Army brigades in Europe, which would bring USAREUR from its current 42,000 troops down to its transformation end state of about 30,000. Lange also wondered whether the U.S. view on the retention of sub-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe had changed. He noted two forthcoming reports of the NATO High Level Group (HLG) and said that the German government would try to "tap down" any public debate on the issue until the U.S. reaches a decision. While not expressing a clear preference on the way ahead, he noted that these weapons had served as "the glue" between the U.S. and Europe on nuclear deterrence.
Koenig